DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 024 631 SP 001 869

By- Foster, Herbert L.
The Inner-City Teacher and Violence: Suggestions for Action Research.
Pub Date Nov 68
Note- 4p.
Journal Cit- Phi Delta Kappan; v50 n3 p172-75 Nov 1968
EDRS Price MF- $0.25 HC Not Available from EDRS.
Descriptors- Action Research, *Behavior Problems, *Cultural Differences, *Disadvantaged Youth, *Intervention, School Personnel, *Teacher Education

To date, efforts to educate the disadvantaged child have failed because most teachers and administrators have been unable to transcend the gulf between his culture and their own. Two concepts, however, are basic to any suggestions about educating the disadvantaged. First, it is possible to educate children "by providing a model for emulation and identification." Second, children frequently test their teachers on the basis of their own cultural frame of reference. Although he may be frightened by the physically aggressive acts of the disadvantaged child, the teacher must not panic; he must develop ways to communicate self-confidence and security to the child. It is suggested that action research be utilized to train school personnel in physical intervention techniques of restraining children (not to be confused with corporal punishment) and to develop school personnel such as the "crisis teacher," who removes the disruptive child from the classroom. (SG)

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
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# The Inner-City Teacher and Violence: Suggestions for Action Research

By HERBERT L. FOSTER

A precarious pupil-teacher relationship is too often destroyed because middle-class oriented Negro and white teachers and supervisors are unaware of and have not been trained in the literal translation and nuances of lower-class verbal and nonverbal communication. Teachers and administrators become frightened by lower socioeconomic class behavior—physically aggressive activity and foul, provocative, and unfamiliar language. The teacher's or supervisor's consequent expression of fear and anxiety, his deprecation of students, and finally his panic provoke an already anxious and fearful student to withdraw stoically or to act out even more.

Therefore in our inner-city schools we have neither been able to communicate with this child nor to discipline him. We have not been able to provide a positive classroom atmosphere in which to educate him. This is the situation in nearly all inner-city schools, and particularly in the junior high schools.

I shall clarify this point of view here and make suggestions for research. Underlying my suggestions are two concepts. First, we can educate children by providing a model for emulation and identification. Second, almost all children test their teachers and their tests are based upon their (the children's) cultural frame of reference.

According to the latest reporting,[1] we have neither been able to educate the disadvantaged urban Negro child nor have we been able to train and retain teachers for inner-city schools. In the area of compensatory education, many causes have been offered to explain the school's failure. First, most compensatory programs have taken a traditional approach, emphasizing: 1) modification in classroom groupings, 2) new materials, 3) lower pupil-teacher ratios, 4) remedial reading, 5) team teaching, 6) teaching machines, 7) educational TV, 8) programmed instruction, etc. We have employed these programs with middle-class children, and they have succeeded.[2]

Most teachers and school administrators have not been able to bridge the gap between their culture and that of their disadvantaged students, nor have they been able to communicate with them.[3] James Coleman (of Coleman Report fame) suggests, "What our study really showed was the relative weakness of the influence of the schools against family and peer influences."[4]

For their part, school districts have attempted to attract and retain teachers in core-area schools with inducements such as: 1) offers of extra remuneration; 2) special in-service courses; 3) special buses to transport staff to their schools; 4) lighter teaching loads; 5) additional unassigned and preparation periods, extra supplies, supportive services; and 6) points on promotional examinations.

To mediate the differences between the majority culture of the teacher and supervisor and the subculture of the disadvantaged child, colleges and universities have at-

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tempted to sensitize teachers to the problems of core-area teaching through course offerings in cultural anthropology, urban sociology, psychology, composition, speech, Negro history, advanced courses in human relations, remedial reading methods and techniques, special methods courses for teaching the disadvantaged, more observations in inner-city schools, and, finally, the removal of teacher-education programs from the university campus to the inner-city school. However, if the Harvard Graduate School of Education is typical of the teacher-education establishment, for most inner-city teachers the words of Betty Levy are quite apropos: "I was initially unprepared and totally at loss. My experiences at Harvard were centered mainly around curriculum improvements (or How To Get College-Level Concepts Down into the Elementary Schools) and around the middle-class suburban children. Harvard's assumptions, methods, and approaches simply did not prepare me at all and are totally irrelevant to the lower-class urban Negro children I am teaching."[5]

Sadly, as adults many educators cannot come to blame themselves for not being able to teach these children, so they blame the children and their parents. Actually, members of nearly all professions are more realistically trained, better equipped, and have more support personnel at their disposal to accomplish their missions than do the teachers we send into the inner-city school.

As we continue to struggle with this situation, may I present three pragmatic suggestions. First, our credo for education must recognize the teacher, whatever his personality, as the prime and indispensable change agent in the teaching-learning process. All else is secondary. Second, let's talk realistically about this child's community and peer subculture as it affects the classroom. Let's examine ways in which the teacher communicates, sets the class atmosphere, motivates and educates this child. And, finally, let us consider whether it is possible to attract a different type of teacher to the inner-city classroom.

Let me explain. In America, the pathology of the Negro urban slum has developed over long years through many ecological patterns. The slum subculture provides disadvantaged children with a "frame of reference" or code of behavior that is different from the middle-class or dominant culture.

Briefly, the disadvantaged child's lower-class life is violent, hostile, aggressive, anxious, and unstable. Often, he turns his aggression on himself, his peers, and authority figures. He learns to fight for everything. He learns "might makes right." As a child, his discipline tends to be physical, custodial, with threats and punishment, rather than psychological.[6]

If you have read Claude Brown's *Manchild in the Promised Land*,[7] and Piri Thomas' *Down These Mean Streets*,[8] which deal with growing up in Harlem and Spanish Harlem, you will recall how, time and time again, the authors make the same point: To make your reputation and not succumb, you had to act crazy and prove yourself with your fists.

Brown writes, "Fighting was the thing that people concentrated on. In our childhood, we all had to make our reputations in the neighborhood. Then we'd spend the rest of our lives living up to them. A man was respected on the basis of his reputation. The people in the neighborhood whom everybody looked up to were the cats who killed somebody. The little boys in the neighborhood whom the adults respected were little boys who didn't let anybody mess with them."[9] Also, "It seemed as though if I had stayed in Harlem all my life, I might never have known that there was anything else in life other than sex, religion, and violence."[10] Those familiar with Greene and Ryan's *The Schoolchildren: Growing up in the Slums*,[11] Le Roi Jones's off-Broadway production of *The Toilet*,[12] or the recent TV special entitled *The Way It Is*[13] (which depicted the New York University Junior High School 57 fiasco in Brooklyn) have read about or observed this continual physical activity.

Additionally, Tennenbaum's "The Teacher, the Middle Class, the Lower Class"[14] describes how one house of lower-class inhabitants unknowingly terrified an entire middle-class block on the West Side of Manhattan. "Boys and girls mixed and it was difficult to think of them as single, individual children. They shouted, they screamed, they pushed, they fought. In the midst of play, they would suddenly get into individual fights and collective fights. Violence, aggression, play, and friendliness seemed all mixed up. Every wall on the block was used, either to play ball on or to throw things at. The streets became cluttered with debris, especially broken glass. . . . What was frightening was the violent, hostile way in which lower-class families found their amusement. An almost palpable atmosphere of aggression and violence hovered over the street. The children would attack an automobile—literally attack it as locusts attack a field—climb on top of it, get inside, and by combined, cooperative effort shake and tug until they left it a wreck. . . . Even their innocent, friendly play was violent. Suddenly, strong, tall, gangling adolescent boys would dash pell-mell down the street, like stampeding cattle, shrieking and screaming, pushing, shoving, mauling each other. . . . Like my neighbors, teachers remain in a perpetual state of fear of these children, at their acting out, their defiance of discipline, their destructiveness and vandalism . . . many teachers feel trapped, frightened, helpless."

Now, I'll pose a question to you. If you subscribe to my theory presented earlier that: 1) almost all children test their teachers from the base of their cultural frame of reference, and that 2) we can educate by providing a model for identification and emulation, then what kind of a teacher do these youngsters need? Are the words "physical prowess" somewhere in your answer?

You may argue that our entire society is becoming more violent.

*"If you insist upon being colloquial, there are two m's in 'gimmie'."*

There is a difference, however, between the violence of the middle class and that of the lower class. In the middle or upper classes violence is experienced vicariously, safely, at a distance, in small chunks, as in TV reporting of the Vietnam conflict or Sunday afternoon professional football. We suffer from spectatoritis. However, for many disadvantaged children violence is a way of life. It is very real; to cope with it is to survive.

Consequently, when the disadvantaged child goes into his "crazy bag" and does his "thing," the teacher is confronted with what he thinks is the reality of violence. And, most often, he panics. What he does not understand is that this youngster is just as frightened as he is. The youngster is testing and, according to Kvaraceus and Miller, his norm-violating behavior "reflects a syndrome crystallized around strong dependency craving." It is a test of the school authorities' ability to meet his need for "being controlled."[15] The youngster is testing and hoping that this so-called adult can control him without hurting him and, somehow, teach him to read and write so that he may make it into the middle class.

As Silberman points out, whites have additional problems, for Negroes have discovered the "power to intimidate—not by violence but by their very presence. . . . And, as Negroes began to sense this, their own attitude changed; one need not fear—and certainly not respect—the man who fears you."[16] Certainly you have observed this reaction to the image of "black power," and certainly the Negro slum child knows this too. As for the Negro teacher, he has other problems in relating to lower-class Negro children.

May I now suggest research that should involve some of the following questions:

How can we at the university and college level educate our future teachers to understand that the teacher through a primarily nonverbal approach—by the way he walks, dresses, arranges his room or gym equipment, smiles, reacts to a crisis situation—can transmit his sense of security to his students? And, because of his inner security, his classroom discipline is neither too rigid nor too permissive. Hence his room is disciplined, *safe, and secure* for all children so that ". . . they may relax and allow themselves to be motivated to learn."[17]

How do we educate to prepare for the realities of what to do when "push come to shove"? How can we educate middle- and upper-class teachers not to panic because of fear? After all, it is normal for an adult to fear an aggressive child. How can we train school personnel to feel as much at home with the realities of violence as a middle-linebacker? How can we teach them not to panic if a child comes running down the hall with a broken bottle in his hand, or two children get into a fight with pipes or fists? Or when, as happened in a nearby area recently, 150 high school students become obstreperous because they can't get in to see a basketball game? You'll notice I didn't say the teacher shouldn't become frightened; I said he should not panic.

Remember, 10 to 15 percent of our population is emotionally disturbed. Therefore, if only one in each class of 30 children is an acting-out, aggressive child, the teacher has problems. In many inner-city schools, discipline takes 75 to 90 percent of the teacher's time. Or, as Morse writes, "School difficulties with discipline increase by the day, both in magnitude and in intensity. It is a symptom of the culture we have produced. In many classrooms, and indeed in whole schools or areas, the anxiety of teachers and administrators has reached high pitch. An incident causes someone to push the panic button for control no matter what the side effects. We are often ready to settle for surface compliance rather than hygienic management which teaches through the confrontation of the problem."[18]

How can we achieve the latter without practicing corporal punishment, while at the same time being perfectly secure in the knowledge that we can handle the most violent surface behavior that may arise?

I suggest that we perform research and actually develop and train school personnel in physical

intervention techniques of restraining children and removing them from the classroom if they cannot control themselves adequately, so that the teacher may teach. Furthermore, we must also perform action research and develop school personnel related to what Morse calls the "crisis teacher."[19] The crisis teacher's role is to remove from the classroom the child who has lost control, and, if necessary, control and calm him, and work with him with what Redl calls "life space interviewing."[20] At the same time, we must discontinue the services of those teachers and administrators who, through their own fears, provoke the children.

Too often, mention of physical intervention techniques raises the question of corporal punishment. Unquestionably, unalterably, and unequivocally, I am opposed to corporal punishment under any pretext. Corporal punishment is a form of escalation that only begets further escalation, alienation, and dropouts. The role we must play is that of physically restraining or holding the child who loses control. The art, of course, is for the teacher to convey his strength to the child without using physical force. If we can get this across to teachers, the overwhelming majority of inner-city school discipline problems will, I think, disappear.

In 1953 Evan Hunter wrote *The Blackboard Jungle*.[21] Almost immediately, the educational establishment attacked him, his book, and the movie that followed for being unrealistic, untrue, exaggerated, and damaging to the teaching profession. Is it possible that since the book and movie, classroom conditions in New York City have deteriorated to the point where the United Federation of Teachers has made a *cause célèbre* of the disruptive pupil? According to *The New York Times* of January 13, 1968, the United Federation of Teachers organized a "panel to investigate ways of handling disruptive pupils."[22] How to handle the disruptive child became a major issue in UFT bargaining with the Board of Education.

I would suggest that until we admit to the incidents that do take place in our schools, perform action research, and devise methods of excluding but educating the disruptive disturbed pupil minority so that those who are well enough to want to learn may do so, we will compound our failures with the disadvantaged school population. Unless we start talking honestly and realistically to this question, we will only contribute to the explosiveness of the "social dynamite"[23] Conant warned about long ago, and "long hot summers" will be a regular feature of the American scene.

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[1]Edmund W. Gordon and Doxey Wilkerson, *Compensatory Education for Disadvantaged-Programs and Practices: Preschool Through College*. New York: College Entrance Examination Board, 1966.

[2]*Ibid.*, pp. 168-70.

[3]Adelaide Jablousky (ed.), *Imperatives for Change*. (Proceedings of the New York State Education Department Conference on College and University Programs for Teachers of the Disadvantaged, April 10-11, 1967, Ferkauf Graduate School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Yeshiva University) Albany, N.Y.: Bureau of Inservice Education, Division of Teacher Education and Certification, State Education Department, 1967, pp. 17-21.

[4]Peter Janssen, "The School Crisis: Any Way Out?" *Newsweek*, September 25, 1967, p. 74.

[5]Betty Levy, "An Urban Teacher Speaks Out," *Harvard Graduate School of Education Association Bulletin*, Summer, 1965.

[6]Suzanne Keller, *The American Lower Class Family*. Albany, N.Y.: State Division for Youth, 1965.

[7]Claude Brown, *Manchild in the Promised Land*. New York: Macmillan, 1965.

[8]Piri Thomas, *Down These Mean Streets*. New York: Albred A. Knopf, 1967.

[9]Brown, *op cit.*, p. 256.

[10]*Ibid.*, p. 281.

[11]Mary Frances Greene and Orletta Ryan, *The Schoolchildren: Growing Up in the Slums*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1966.

[12]Le Roi Jones, "The Toilet," *Kulchur*. New York: Kulchur Press, Spring, 1963, pp. 25-39.

[13]"The Way It Is," *National Educational Television Journal*, May 1, 1967.

[14]Samuel Tennenbaum, "The Teacher, the Middle Class, the Lower Class," PHI DELTA KAPPAN, November, 1963, pp. 82-86.

[15]W. C. Kvaraceus and W. B. Miller, *Delinquent Behavior: Culture and the Individual*. Washington, D.C.: NEA, 1964, pp. 68, 99.

[16]Charles E. Silberman, *Crisis in Black and White*. New York: Vintage Books, 1964, p. 64.

[17]Herbert L. Foster, "Teaching Industrial Arts to the Emotionally Disturbed Student," *Industrial Arts and Vocational Education*, January, 1964, p. 23.

[18]William C. Morse, *Psychological Consultation in the Schools: A Catalyst for Learning*. New York: Basic Books, 1967, p. viii.

[19]William C. Morse, "The Crisis Teacher, Public School Provision for the Disturbed Pupil," *The University of Michigan School of Education Bulletin*, April, 1962, pp. 101-104.

[20]Ruth G. Newman and Marjorie M. Keith, *The School-Centered Life Space Interview*. Washington, D.C.: Washington School of Psychiatry, 1964.

[21]Evan Hunter, *The Blackboard Jungle*. New York: Dell, 1966.

[22]"Panel To Investigate Ways of Handling Disruptive Pupils," *The New York Times*, January 13, 1968, p. 29.

[23]James B. Conant, *Slums and Suburbs*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1961. □